

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 AGR-05

FRB-03 FEAE-00 INT-05 /079 W
----- 040128

P R 191625Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8311

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

USDAO CARACAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT OF SPAIN 2359

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, TD

SUBJECT: COMMENT ON TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CABINET RESHUBRFLE

REF: POS 2357

1. ALTHOUGH THE CAST OF CHARACTERS REMAINED COMPLETELY UNCHANGED, THE SEPT 18 CABINET RESHUFFLE (REFTEL) NEVER- THE LESS SUCCEEDED IN APPARENTLY STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNMENT'S FOCUS ON PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION WHICH HAVE INCREASINGLY CAPTURED PUBLIC ATTENTION IN RECENT MONTHS.

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

2. IN FIELD OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, THE PRIME MINISTER HAD PUBLICLY COMMENTED EARLIER (SEE POS A-88) ON NEED FOR DELINEATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY
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OF COMMERCIAL FIRMS IN WHICH GOTT HOLDS SIGNIFICANT EQUITY

AND FOR ESTABLISHING MECHANISM FOR FOLLOW-UP ON GOVERNMENT MISMANAGEMENT REVEALED IN REPORTS OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL. TWO NEW "MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY" POSITIONS IN FINANCE ARE DESIGNED TO DO THIS, WHILE FORMAL ASSUMPTION OF FINANCE AND HOUSING PORTFOLIOS BY WILLIAMS HIMSELF EMPHASIZES COMMITMENT OF HIS PRESTIGE IN THESE PUBLICLY SENSITIVE AREAS AS ELECTION TIME APPROACHES. PREVATT, IN WHO WILLIAMS IS BELIEVED TO PLACE GREAT CONFIDENCE, WILL OBVIOUSLY BE THE OPERATIONAL HEAD OF THE FINANCE MINISTRY. THE TWO NEW POSITIONS CREATED FOR CORPORATE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORTS WOULD PERHAPS BE EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE EXCEPT FOR THE RELATIVELY POOR MANAGEMENT TRACK RECORD OF ROBINSON AT AGRICULTURE AND GOMES AT EDUCATION.

3. ALTHOUGH FORMER FINANCE MINISTER CHAMBERS HAS BEEN WELL-REGARDED, HIS REMOVAL FROM POWERFUL FINANCE SLOT ALONG WITH HIS PERMANENT SECRETARY FRANK RAMPERSAD AT THIS TIME MAY PARTIALLY BE RELATED TO REPORTS WE HAVE HEARD OF PRIME MINISTER'S DISPLEASURE AT MINISTRY'S HANDLING OR MISHANDLING OF TT CURRENCY REVALUATION ISSUE FOLLOWING SIGNIFICANT SLIDE OF BRITISH POUND TO WHICH TT\$ IS NOW TIED.

4. THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT'S FUNCTIONS HAD BEEN VIRTUALLY ABSORBED IN OTHER MINISTRIES ALREADY DURING THE PAST YEAR AND ABLE PERMANENT SECRETARY FRANK BARSOTTI'S TALENTS WERE LARGELY UNDER UTILIZED IN THE MINISTRY ITSELF. HE HAS ALSO FUNCTIONED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF CARONI (SUGAR) AND IN OTHER CAPACITIES, HOWEVER. HIS SHIFT TO THE PS SLOT IN FINANCE IS A RECOGNITION OF HIS VALUE AND SKILL. WE WOULD ANTICIPATE, HOWEVER, THAT FORMER FINANCE PERM SEC FRANK RAMPERSAD MAY BE GIVEN ANOTHER IMPORTANT ROLE WITHIN THE AREA OF PUBLIC CORPORATIONS OR FINANCE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IN ANNOUNCING THE NEW FINANCE APPOINTMENTS, THE PRIME MINISTER SOUNDED A CAUTIONARY NOTE AGAINST EXCESSIVE EXPANSION OF GOVERNMENT INTO THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND PLEDGED GREATER CABINET CONTROL OVER THE TENDENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO EXPAND INVESTMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDS IN AREAS WHERE THE NATIONAL INTEREST OR PUBLIC STAKE IS QUITE CLEARLY NOT PARAMOUNT.

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INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, PETROLEUM AND MINES

5. ERROL MAHABIR FOR SOME TIME HAS CLEARLY BEEN THE MOST ENERGETIC AND PROBABLY MOST POWERFUL MEMBER OF THE CABINET AND HAS BEEN HEAVILY RELIED UPON BY WILLIAMS. HIS NEWLY ENHANCED POSITION AS MINISTER BOTH OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, AND PETROLEUM AND MINES, FURTHER SOLIDIFIES HIS POSITION AS

SECOND IN SIGNIFICANCE ONLY TO THAT OF PRIME MINISTER
HIMSELF.

EDUCATION

6. SECONDARY EDUCATION HAS BEEN AMONG MOST VOLATILE PUBLIC
ISSUES THIS YEAR AND SHIFT OF HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE FINANCE
MINISTER CHAMBERS TO THE EDUCATION SLOT SHOULD GIVE
PUBLIC SOME CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT FOLLOWING
THE INEFFECTIVE TENURE OF GOMES. THE PRIME MINISTER
ANNOUNCED SEVERAL IMPORTANT CABINET DECISIONS IN FIELD
OF EDUCATION ALONG WITH CABINET RESHUFFLE. PRINCIPALLY,
THESE INCLUDE: A) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOLS RATHER THAN SEPARATE ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL
SCHOOLS AFTER JUNIOR HIGH LEVEL; B) EMERGENCY ACCELERATION
OF JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM TO
BE FINANCED FROM THE PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT FUND; AND C)
ESTABLISHMENT OF FIVE YEARS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLING AS
THE NORMATIVE GOAL. SEE POS A-88 OF SEPT 18 FOR FURTHER
BACKGROUND ON EDUCATION DEBATE.

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USIA-06 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 AGR-05

FRB-03 FEAE-00 INT-05 /079 W
----- 040293

P R 191625Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8312

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

LPNSON/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 1332

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

USDAO CARACAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 PORT OF SPAIN 2359

NATIONAL SECURITY

WIM REMOVAL SIMULTANEOUSLY OF BOTH MINISTER AND PERMANENT SECRETARY IN MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY WAS COUPLED WITH PLEDGE BY WILLIAMS TO KEEP IN MUCH CLOSER DIRECT PERSONAL CONTACT IN THE FUTURE WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE DEFENSE FORCES (BRIGADIER SERRETTE) ANE COMMISSIONER OF NATIONAL POLICE (MAY). THIS MOVE PROBABLY STEMS FROM LONG-HEARD RUMBLINGS FROM DEFENSE FORCE INDICATING THAT MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN GUISE OF MAINTAINING CIVILIAN CONTROL EFFECTIVELY DELAYED OR FRUSTRATED ALMOST ALL MILITARY PROGRAMS OR PROJECTS. WHILE IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER NEW ARRANGEMENT WILL BE EFFECTIVELY DIFFERENT, ENAHNCED DIRECT DEFENSE FORCE ACCESS TO THE PRIME MINISTER IN LATTER'S ROLE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL SHOULD SUFFICE TO ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BUREAUCRATIC ROADBLOCKS. MOVE OF ONE OF GOVERNMENT'S MORE EFFECTIVE PERMANENT SECRETARIES, TEASLEY TAITT, TO NATIONAL SECURITY ALSO MAY FORESHADOW IMPROVED MANAGEMENT IN THE MINISTRY. THE DEW MINISTER, VICTOR CAMPBELL, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN IN MINISTRY OF WORKS SINCE 1956 AND HAS HAD NO KNOWN PREVIOUS DIRECT ASSOCIATION WITH NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS. SINCE HIS RECORD AT WORKS HAS NOT EXACTLY BEEN BRILLIANT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE WILL BE OVERSHADOWED BY THE DIRECT ACCESS HIS MILITARY AND POLICE SUBORDINATES ARE NOW SUPPOSED TO HAVE TO WILLIAMS. FURTHERMORE, CAMPBELL'S AVAILABILITY FOR EMERGENCY MATTERS IS LIKELY TO BE SOMEWHAT CIRCUMSCRIBED FOR HE DEPARTS HIS PORT OF SPAIN OFFICES EARLY EACH DAY TO COMMUTE HOME TO HIS DISTRICT IN THE EXTREME SOUTHEAST CORNER OF THE COUNTRY NEAR GUAYAGUAYARE. ALTHOUGH NOT ANNOUNCED, FORMER NATIONAL SECURITY PERMANENT SECRETARY EUAN NUNEZ IS EXPECTED TO RETIRE.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

8. WILLIAMS' RELINQUISHMENT OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO AT THIS TIME PROBABLY REFLECTS BOTH HIS ESTIMATE THAT THIS IS NOT THE AREA OF GREATEST CONCERN FOR HIS GOVERNMENT IN THE MONTHS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD AND HIS RELUCTANCE TO BE IMPORTUNED DIRECTLY BY THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS HERE. THE ENHANCED STATURE THUS ACCORDED MINISTER CUTHBERT JOSEPH WILL BE PARTICULARLY WELCOME TO THE LATTER IF

ACCOMPANIED WITH ENHANCED RESPONSIBILITY AS WELL, FOR IN THE PAST DR. JOSEPHA HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT FRUSTRATED BY THE VERY SHORT LEASH HELD IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S HANDS. IN ANNOUNCING THE APPOINTMENT, WILLIAMS PLEDGED TO ENSURE ENHANCED COORDINATION BETWEEN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, PETROLEUM AND MINES, AND INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, REGARDING OPEC MATTERS, CARICOM, TRADE ISSUES, AND THE BRIEFING OF GOTT DELEGATES TO INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS.

COMMENT

9. WHILE CERTAINLY NO REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE HAS BEEN EFFECTED AND NO NEW TALENT HAS EMERGED, THE CABINET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHUFFLE REFLECTS A REDIRECTION OF HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT ENERGIES IN SEVERAL AREAS OF HIGH CURRENT CONCERN TO THE PUBLIC AND COULD SERVE TO VITALIZE AND IMPROVE GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN EDUCATION, HOUSING, SUPERVISION OF GOVERNMENT AND JOINT VENTURE ENTERPRISES, AND NATIONAL SECURITY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, REORGANIZATIONS, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, POLITICAL SUMMARIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PORTO02359
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750325-0951
From: PORT OF SPAIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750935/aaaabeun.tel
Line Count: 250
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 SEP 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <15 DEC 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: COMMENT ON TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CABINET RESHUBRFLE
TAGS: PGOV, TD, (WILLIAMS, ERIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006